

**ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT
IN
A VIRTUAL WORK ENVIRONMENT**

Thesis Submitted for the Degree
Of
Doctor of Philosophy

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July, 2006

Certificate of Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate:

Acknowledgements

"Rome was not built in a day" and a good piece of work needs time and persistence to make it. Over five years, I spent a very enjoyable period of my life with this research during which I learnt that facts are precious things and need personal proximity and ambitious effort to find them.

The exploratory side of this thesis was a great source of joy and motivation to me but it would not have been completed without the assistance my wife Dania and other people who helped me a great deal to complete this thesis, and many of whom will never know the extent of their contribution and support.

I am deeply indebted and profoundly thankful to my supervisor Professor Thomas Clarke and co-supervisor Dr. John Crawford who gave me the support, devotion and motivation over the last five years without which I couldn't accomplish this thesis alone.

In addition, I would to thank the staff of the school of Management at UTS for their help and support particularly Professor Ian Palmer, Professor Stewart Clegg, and Dr Stephen Teo.

Also, my appreciation is extended to those who participated in the empirical research and gave me their personal time and advice particularly Dr. Heinz Hermann the general manager of sales and operations in Sing-Tel Optus and David Purcell who was the national sales manager for General Motors-Daewoo Group for giving me a deeper insight in the virtual work phenomenon based on their practical and international experience in virtual working.

Finally I wish to express my gratitude and thanks to my parents, family and friends for their moral support and encouragement in my personal endeavors. Indeed success is not only a one-man-effort and I feel that I owe the successful completion of this research to every one supported and helped me directly and indirectly.

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Abstract

The accelerating advances in information technology and the development in electronic communication were essential precursors for the emergence of virtual organizations and new work environments that rely primarily on electronic communication and physical separation between the worker and the organization.

In a virtual work environment, the spatial barrier between the workers and the organization could weaken their ties with the organization and could promote feelings of isolation. Also, since virtual workers are invisible, research suggests that external control and monitoring systems need to be reinforced with psychological linkages which act as an internal control system for the behavior and beliefs of the virtual workers (e.g. Wiesenfeld, Raghuram & Garud, 1999, 2001).

Organizational commitment appears to be appealing to the virtual work environment because it motivates the worker to go beyond the call of duty and develop a strong internal belief in the organizational goals and values with a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. Also, research indicates that it is associated with favorable behaviors by the organization such as low turnover, low absenteeism, job satisfaction, job involvement, internal locus of control, extra roll behavior and higher productivity (e.g. Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

However, most of the research of organizational commitment was conducted in traditional work environments and little attention was given to the study of organizational commitment in virtual work environments.

This thesis examines the influence of various personal and work-related variables on workers' organizational commitment in a virtual work environment. The thesis also examines the differences between virtual and traditional workers on the level of their organizational commitment and other perceptions.

But because of the lack of literature about organizational commitment in virtual work environments, the empirical part of this thesis involved a preliminary qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with workers involved in virtual working. The results of the in-depth interviews indicated that there is a positive connection between affective organizational commitment and virtual workers' perceptions about organizational support, electronic communication and consideration leadership in a virtual work environment.

Following the qualitative study, a questionnaire-based survey was conducted, which involved a sample of 184 traditional and virtual workers taken from a large national and international organization in Australia. The selection of variables in the questionnaire survey was guided by the findings of the qualitative study as well as the literature review. The questionnaire involved measures for the affective, continuance and normative forms of organizational commitment as well as personal and work-related perceptions.

The results of the questionnaire survey indicated that there is no significant difference between traditional and virtual workers' affective, continuance and normative forms of organizational commitment. Also, workers in a virtual work environment showed higher affective occupational commitment than in traditional work environments as

well as higher self perceptions of personal attributes such as self-leadership, self-efficacy and psychological empowerment.

In addition, results of regression analysis indicated that the supervisory communication satisfaction, perceived organizational support, individualized personal consideration dimension of transformational leadership and IT-self-efficacy have stronger positive effect on workers' affective organizational commitment in a virtual work environment than a traditional one. On the other hand, transactional leadership and continuance occupational commitment showed a stronger positive effect on workers' continuance organizational commitment in a virtual work environment than a traditional one. Finally, perceived organizational support showed a stronger positive effect on worker's normative organizational commitment in a virtual work environment than a traditional one. However, trust in management showed a stronger positive effect on normative organizational commitment in a traditional work environment than a virtual one.

The findings of this research have important implications in the organizational and management studies and contribute to the work of a number of writers in the area of virtual working (e.g. Raghuram, et al., 2001, 2003; Staples, Hulland & Higgins, 1999; Wiesenfeld, Raghuram & Garud, 1999, 2001) and in the area of organizational commitment (e.g. Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer, Herscovitch, 2001; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, Topolnytsky, 2002). Also, the findings of this thesis break a new ground for designing effective virtual work programs and contribute to understanding the human aspects of virtual working.